

AG talks Internet safety with middle school kids

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KINGMAN - More than 400 sixth- and seventh-graders at White Cliffs Middle School had an interactive session Monday with Attorney General Terry Goddard, who made a presentation on Internet safety.

The presentation was the 15th on Internet safety Goddard and members of his staff have done at schools.

"I find middle school students make the best audiences," Goddard said before starting his talk. "They're Web-able, using it a lot, and somewhat coachable.

"High school students turn you off because they feel they have it all figured out."

Goddard began by explaining his office is filled with lawyers who take people accused of drug and Internet crimes to court and try to get them convicted.

He asked students how many hours per day they spent on the Internet. Many said six, a few claimed eight hours daily.

"The point is made," he said. "You and your classmates are serious Internet users.

He asked how many students use instant messaging, and most hands went up. When asked how many use a MySpace page, roughly half of the students raised their hands.

MySpace is popular as a social networking site, along with Facebook.

All but a handful of students said they use chat room sites or engage in gaming on the Internet in response to a question from Goddard.

A short video was played that demonstrated the dangers of chat rooms. "Julie's Journey" is based on a true story.

Julie said she is 13 years old and got into serious trouble on the Internet. She related her story of contacting Tom, who she thought was about her age.

"I didn't know at the time he was 56," she said. "It was nice not having someone telling you what to do and our contacts became a relationship."

Tom and Julie would instant message each other 3-6 times daily. If Julie was slow to respond to a message, Tom would ask her where she was and make her feel guilty. The relationship went through stages of friends, best friends and more than best friends,

with Tom becoming more manipulative as it progressed. He eventually suggested it would be good if the two of them were together all the time, sewing a seed that finally led Julie to run away with Tom.

"(Police) found us headed for Reno," Julie said. "He's now in jail for 25 years.

"He later said it was all my fault and he's going to kill me when he gets out.

"Now that I'm back home, there's a huge emptiness in me. If only I could talk to someone who has some different views.

"But I do know running away solves nothing and I will never do it again."

After the video concluded, Goddard discussed what students had just seen. While Tom never openly stated his age, he led Julie to believe he was about her age and shared common interests with her. He took her side whenever she railed against some discipline put upon her at home.

Julie had control of Internet conversations, so what should she have done differently? Block the incoming instant messages or not respond to them, Goddard said. If the sender wants to meet you, tell him no. Julie made a further mistake by meeting Tom in a dark alley instead of a public place with other people around and where she could have walked away or screamed for help if she felt threatened.

Part of the presentation included urging students to use privacy blocks on instant messages, otherwise, any of about 120 million MySpace users can access them for information.

Goddard told students no previous generation has had so much access to the Internet. "You're on the cutting edge of learning about this technology," he said. "How many parents know about MySpace?

"A national survey indicated just 10 percent of parents have an idea who to report an Internet crime to."

Goddard also touched on the topic of cyberspace bullying. It can take such forms as someone tying up your instant messaging, posting phony Web site information about you or making threats, all of which are illegal.

"Tell someone if these things happen to you," Goddard said. "They're not just illegal, they can tear a community apart by causing you and your parents problems, even if you just pass on a message."